

Got Septic?



SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENCES

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) answered by Environmental Health Services (DEHS) – Waste Water section

1. What is a septic system?

- According to the Uniform Plumbing Code (UPC) “when a public sewer is not available, a building may be connected to a private sewage disposal system” or “septic system.”
- A septic system is comprised of a septic tank and a soil absorption system.

2. What types of septic systems are reviewed by San Bernardino County?

- There are two types of standard soil absorption systems: seepage pits and leach lines.

3. Why do people use different types of septic systems? (pros and cons of each)

- Seepage pits are vertical and generally take up less surface area on a lot. Often, in the presence of a clay layer, seepage pits are used. They can also be paved over but are often more costly to construct. The construction of seepage pits is not allowed in the mountains.
- Leach lines are horizontal trenches. They stay within a shallow enough depth to treat the wastewater in a more effective way that is aided by evaporation and transpiration.

4. How do I know if I'm on septic or sewer?

- Local sewerage entities are most often city agencies. They are likely to know the location of their sewer in relation to your lot, as well as connection information.

5. Where is my septic system?

- DEHS does not know where your septic system is located. Please call a local plumber to locate your system.

6. How close do I have to be to sewer to be required to connect?

- In most areas of the county, the UPC and the California Regional Water Quality Control Boards (RWQCB) require you to connect to the sewer system if you are within 200 feet.

7. Who do I call if I'm having problems with my septic system?

- Please call a plumber.

8. How do I know what size septic tank I need?

- For residential projects, that depends on how many bedrooms will be in your home

# bedrooms	Minimum gallon size tank
5-6	1500
4	1200
3	1000
1-2	750

9. What is the minimum lot size required for a septic system?

- Most of the West Valley is requested by the Santa Ana RWQCB to have a minimum lot size of a one-half acre per dwelling unit using a septic system. This applies to lots receiving approval or created after September 7, 1989.
- Most of the High Desert is requested by the Lahonton RWQCB to have a minimum lot size of a one-half acre per dwelling unit using a septic system. This applies to lots receiving approval or created after April 24, 1987.
- Most of the Low Desert (Morongo Valley and eastwards) is not requested by the Colorado River RWQCB to have a minimum lot size per septic system.

10. What happens if I don't meet these requirements?

- Your options are to go to the appropriate RWQCB to ask for an exemption, connect to sewer or consider installing a septic system with secondary treatment in order to reduce your total absorption area.

11. How do I get approval for a new septic system?

- Submit a percolation report and plot plans to DEHS for review and approval.
- Obtain permits through city or San Bernardino County Building and Safety.

12. Are there any review fees?

- Yes. Fees are based on project type.
Please inquire for more information.

13. What is a “perc rate”?

- In general, it is a number resulting from a scientific process performed by a professional. It tells how suitable the soil is in supporting a septic system. This information helps to design your septic system according to the specific conditions onsite.

14. How do I know if my lot has a perc rate or not?

- Provide EHS with an Assessor’s Parcel Number (APN) to search for a perc rate, if one is available.

15. When is a “percolation test” needed?

- In all subdivision of land, even if a local perc rate is available.
- For new septic systems in mountain areas.
- For any commercial or industrial projects.
- Where existing data will not allow DEHS to set a design rate.
- In the presence of challenging factors such as steep slope, shallow depth to groundwater, nearby stream, etc.

16. Who does a percolation test?

- Mostly California Registered Engineers or geologists working for an environmental consultant.

17. What is DEHS looking for on a “plot plan”?

- In general, a plot plan submitted to DEHS for review should show the property line, a footprint of the house or building, and the dimensions and location of the septic system. Note the number of bedrooms or number of fixture units. Make sure all the minimum setbacks are met. Show contours and scale.

Please inquire for more detailed checklist.

18. Who draws the plot plan?

- Mostly engineers, architects, surveyors or some septic system installers.
- You can also draw it yourself by hand or use a computer.

19. How far does a septic system have to be from:

Property line adjoining private property:

- A minimum of 5 feet from septic tank and/or leach lines; 8 feet from seepage pits

Water Well:

- A minimum of 100 feet from septic tank and/or leach lines; 150 feet from seepage pits.

Ephemeral stream / Drainage course:

- A minimum of 50 feet from septic tank and/or leach lines or seepage pits.

Perennial stream / USGS Blue line stream:

- A minimum of 100 feet from septic tank and/or leach lines or seepage pits.

Please inquire for more minimum setbacks, especially for subdivisions in the San Bernardino Valley and High Desert.

20. How much distance is needed between multiple leach lines (LL) or multiple seepage pits?

- For LL trenches 3 feet wide by 3 feet below the inlet: minimum 8 feet from trench edge to trench edge.
- For LL trenches 3 feet wide by 2 feet below the inlet: minimum 6 feet from trench edge to trench edge.
- For LL trenches 3 feet wide by 1 feet below the inlet: minimum 4 feet from trench edge to trench edge.
- For seepage pits: minimum 12 feet from pit edge to pit edge.

21. "I am remodeling my house of 2 bedrooms by adding 2 more bedrooms. How does this affect my septic system?"

- The minimum septic tank size for a 2-bedroom house is 750 gallons, whereas a minimum 1200-gallon size septic tank is needed for a 4-bedroom house. In this case, you would have to upgrade to a 1200-gallon size tank and increase the size of the soil absorption field to accommodate this new tank size.

22. "I'm subdividing 5 acres into 5 1-acre lots, but there is a building on the parcel now. Do I have to perc for that lot too?"

- In general, no, but you do have to get the septic system of the existing home certified.

23. "How do I get my septic system certified?"

- Pick up a form for Private Sewage Disposal System Certification from DEHS and have a professional, as listed at the top of the form, certify your system.

24. "I want to put a mobile home in the back of my house. Can I connect it to my existing septic?"

- In general, yes, if you meet any applicable minimum lot size requirements or obtain RWQCB approval for an exemption, or if your existing septic system is certified to be large enough to accommodate the additional connection.

25. "I have a ½ acre lot and want to add a second house in the back for my mom. What do I need to get DEHS approval?"

- Ask DEHS staff if there is a perc rate for that area or if a perc test has been done and a record is on file with DEHS.
- If you cannot meet the minimum setbacks requested by the RWQCB, then you must obtain a letter stating their approval for an exemption.
- Provide DEHS with a perc report or perc rate plus plot plans showing the existing and proposed septic systems, along with a copy of the approval letter from the RWQCB.



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